

## SMCAT: South Mountain downplayed by ADOT

[By Doug Murphy | AFN](#)

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On Thursday night the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Committee listened to a confusing presentation on how excessive freeway noise impacting school playgrounds has to be mitigated, but that the noise impacting a school classroom is a different topic and would be dealt with at a later meeting.

They were also told that while it didn't appear there would be any impacts on the schools near Pecos Road, the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) had just received information from the Kyrene School District, which would have to be evaluated before they could get back to advisory team members.

It's a reframe that Brian Smith, a member of the advisory committee representing the Calabrea Homeowners Association, has heard before.

"We hear that a lot: 'We'll talk about that later,'" he said after the Aug. 28 meeting. SMCAT members are tasked with helping ADOT officials update the 1985 freeway plan to take into account growth and development over the past two decades.

The advisory team was also told there were remains of six Hohokam villages on the west side of the proposed path, along with lithic quarries where Indians collected rocks used to make tools, and a petroglyph site and trails in the Ahwatukee Foothills area would also be affected and would require some kind of mitigation.

But the big issue, both literally and figuratively, is South Mountain Park, which has both historic and pre-historic elements. SMCAT members were told construction of the freeway through 32 acres, cutting hundreds of feet deep through three ridges, wouldn't be a problem.

Ruth Greenspan, a historic preservation specialist with ADOT, said no special efforts would be needed because no historic elements of significance are in the freeways right of way, despite Gila River Indian Community's resolution calling South Mountain sacred and culturally significant.

That issue has held up approval of a draft environmental impact statement as the tribe and ADOT attempt to reach a mutually satisfactory solution on how to cut into the park.

Mike Goodman, who represents the Phoenix Mountain Preservation Council, argued that often ADOT down plays open space, like the ridges that must be gouged out.

"You keep down playing South Mountain because it's undeveloped," Goodman said.

The freeway has been controversial almost from the beginning. In 1985 it was approved, but funding soon ran low and it was put on the back-burner. As Ahwatukee Foothills grew - from 2,172 people in 1980 to 62,519 in 1995 - ADOT considered several options, including allowing a toll road south of Pecos Road and allowing the city of Phoenix to build Pecos Road as a parkway around South Mountain.

In 2001, ADOT began a new study to update the old plan and take into account rapid growth along the freeway's proposed route, along Pecos Road, through the park and then north to connect with Interstate 10.

Since 2001 the estimated cost has grown from \$900 million to \$1.7 billion, with a new update expected in September.

As the cost of the freeway grows, so does the number of homes that will need to be demolished in Ahwatukee Foothills - from 255 to 317 as planners went from the original six-lane concept in 1985 to the current 10-lane plan.